



# **New Albany Historic Districts – An Introduction**

## **History of New Albany**

New Albany is located on the Ohio River in southern Indiana. Bothers Joel, Abner and Nathaniel Scribner founded the city in 1813. They selected the site because of its strategic position just below the Falls of the Ohio, the only unnavigable portion of the Ohio River. The Scribners purchased more than 800 acres of land and laid out a town that extended from present-day West Fifth Street to East Fifth Street, and from the river north to Oak Street. Joel Scribner's home at 106 East Main Street, built in 1814, is believed to be the oldest building remaining in the city.

At the time New Albany was founded, there was heavy traffic on the Ohio River. The position of the new settlement made it a natural port and the plentiful supply of high-

quality timber made it a shipbuilding center. The village of New Albany grew rapidly: it was incorporated as a city in 1839 and by 1850 had become the largest and one of the most prosperous cities in Indiana, with a population of 8,181 people.

During New Albany's steamboat era (about 1817-1867), the riverfront developed with ship building yards and related industries, such as lumberyards and blacksmith shops. The commercial area was located above the river, on Main, Market and Spring Streets. This area is distinctive for its outstanding collection of Federal and Greek Revival styles of commercial structures. As the business district grew, State and Pearl Streets developed with outstanding Italianate-style commercial buildings.

Working class neighborhoods developed to the west and northeast of the commercial area. Two of these neighborhoods are the West End area including West Market and West Spring streets and the East Oak area including East Elm and East Oak Streets and Culbertson Avenue. The residential neighborhood along Main Street to the east was home to the prominent and affluent residents of the city. As the city continued to grow the area north of Main Street became a middle- to upper-class neighborhood made up of East Market, East Spring and East Elm streets.

As the population of southern Indiana grew, the volume of surplus farm goods increased. New Albany was an important market destination for these products. Many roads were built, including Paoli Pike, which is State Street inside the city limits, and Corydon Pike. One of the state's first railroads, the New Albany and Salem, later part of the Monon Line, was completed to Salem in 1851. This was a new beginning for New Albany as a railroad center.

New Albany had a diverse population of African-Americans, Irish, Germans, Southerners and Northerners. African-American neighborhoods were located on the northwest side of the city in the vicinity of West and Ealy streets and on the northeast side around Division and East Eighteenth streets. Many Irish families lived in "Keelyburg," near the riverfront southwest of the original plat. The area in the vicinity of State and Union streets was a German neighborhood.

Schools and churches were built for the city's growing population. Most of the early schools are now gone. Among these was New Albany High School, the first public high school in the state; later the building became Scribner High School for the African-American population. One of the outstanding churches in New Albany is the Second

Presbyterian Church, completed in 1852. Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church was built in 1858 and the first edifice of the German Methodist Church in 1861. There were also churches for Baptist, Episcopalian and other denominations.

As the steamboat industry ended after the Civil War, several new industries were started to take its place. The largest of these was the American Plate Glass Works, which employed over 1,200 workers and covered 30 acres along the river. Other large employers included the New Albany Woolen and Cotton Mills, Ohio Falls Iron Works, the New Albany Rail Mill and the New Albany Hoosier Mill. There were many smaller industries as well, including the Day Leather Company, Mosier Tannery, Anchor Stove and Range, the Monon Repair Shops and numerous foundries, breweries, slaughterhouses and furniture factories.

The shipping capacities of New Albany were enhanced by the arrival of the New Albany and Saint Louis Air Line railroad in 1882. Four years later, the K & I Bridge was constructed to carry rail traffic over the Ohio River. The present K & I Bridge replaced this earlier one in 1912.

As New Albany prospered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the population grew rapidly, reaching 21,059 by 1890. Facilitated by transportation advances such as mule-drawn streetcars, residents began to move outward from the city center. The scenic hill area known as Silver Hills became an early and affluent suburb of New Albany. Main Street Hill Road originally connected Silver Hills with the city and in 1890 the New Albany Highland Railroad Company was organized to provide electric streetcar service to "the Hill." The area between Vincennes and Silver streets was developing as a working to middle-class residential area. The town of Silver Grove, east of Silver Street, began as a middle-class

suburb of New Albany and was annexed into the city in 1914.

The discovery of natural gas in east central Indiana in the late 1880s was disastrous for New Albany. The local economy was heavily dependent on the glass industry, but glass could be produced more cheaply with this new fuel. Competition from factories to the north caused New Albany factories to either close or move, and many of the skilled workers in the industry also moved. The interrelationship among New Albany industries caused other factories to close.

However, as the population grew in other parts of the state and nation, the demand for lumber products increased. New Albany had several wood-related industries already, including a number of furniture factories. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearby forests and a large labor pool were utilized to expand the number of industries manufacturing wood products. Plywood and veneer became local specialties. One of the first and largest factories for this purpose was the Indiana Veneer and Panel Company, started in 1902, and located on the east side of Silver Street south of the B&O Railroad tracks. Between 1898 and 1923 a total of seven plywood and veneer factories were established. By 1920 when these industries were at their height, New Albany's population had grown to 22,992, ranking it the second largest city in southern Indiana.

Population growth resulted in expansion of the city. Several early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods were established. The Meadows and Catherine Place were developed as working class neighborhoods. Cedar Bough Place, Shelby Place and DePauw Avenue were neighborhoods of the middle class.

The 1920s were prosperous years in New Albany. Plywood and veneer factories continued to be important to the economy.

The garment industry was also a major employer, providing a large number of jobs to women who were increasingly working outside the home. M. Fine and Sons, established around 1920 to manufacture work shirts, operated until 2002. The H. A. Seinsheimer Clothing Factory, built in 1926, was an important employer until it closed in 1976.

As the population continued to increase, new and larger schools were needed. The present New Albany High School was completed in 1927 and the East Spring Street School in 1930. Griffin Street School, one of the last segregated schools to be constructed in the state for African-American children, was built in 1939.

The Great Depression caused the closing of many businesses and industries, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century disasters had an impact on the city as well. A major tornado tore through the city in 1917 killing a number of residents and leaving several thousand people homeless. It destroyed the summer home of the Washington C. DePauw family on Charlestown Road. The large estate was ultimately developed as a residential area including Florence, Vance, Beechwood, Burton and DePauw Avenues.

The 1937 flood caused an estimated eight million dollars in damage. Valley View Court was built soon after to provide housing for low-income families who had been displaced by the flood. Twenty of the houses were prefabricated wood structures built by Foster Gunnison, a pioneer in factory built houses. After the 1937 flood, local interest in constructing a floodwall grew. World War II delayed action on the project, but construction finally began in 1949 and was completed in 1953. Built as a project of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the floodwall is 18,509 feet long and has a complex system of gates and pumping stations. The combination of the 1937 flood and the

construction of the floodwall resulted in the destruction or removal of many old buildings on New Albany's riverfront.

As World War II approached, new jobs relating to the military were created. The flood's destruction, along with the demands of the war created a housing crisis. The New Albany Housing Authority was created to deal with this problem. Beechwood Court was constructed to house workers at the Charlestown Powder Plant in Clark County. During the war, the economy fared well while local factories supplied the needs of the military. New Albanians accepted the shortages of wartime and consumer demand grew after the armistice. The post-war era was one of prosperity as local industries worked to meet those demands.



*Southeast corner State and Spring Streets, c.1920. Former Floyd County Courthouse in the foreground and Post Office/Customs House is in the rear.*

## **Historic Preservation in New Albany**

As happened in many other cities, the 1960s and 1970s brought urban renewal and the interstate highway system to New Albany. Many significant historic buildings were lost, including the Floyd County Courthouse, the U.S. Customhouse and Post Office and the old New Albany High School. The nation's

bicentennial brought renewed interest in our history, however, and the proposed demolition of the Culbertson Mansion galvanized local support for preservation.

The city of New Albany first passed an ordinance establishing a local historic preservation review board in 1986, at the urging of the Main Street Preservation Association. The ordinance was revised in 1998 and the first Preservation Commission appointed. The Mansion Row district was designated the next year. In 2002, downtown and Cedar Bough Place became the city's second and third locally regulated historic districts, and the East Spring Street district was created in 2003.

## **The Role of the Historic Preservation Commission**

The Historic Preservation Commission is charged with protecting the character of New Albany's historic districts by reviewing proposed exterior changes to buildings within the districts. The Commission does this by issuing a 'Certificate of Appropriateness' (COA) for work that it finds will not adversely affect the historic or architectural character of the district.

The Preservation Commission is made up of five to nine volunteer members, appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The voting members of the Commission must be residents of New Albany with a demonstrated interest in historic preservation. Non-voting, advisory members may also be appointed to the Commission. To the extent possible, members and advisors include professionals in the fields of architecture, planning, architectural history, and other areas related to historic preservation. Staff support to the Commission is provided by Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and the staff of the New Albany City Plan Commission.

## **The COA Application and Review Process**

Section 151.06 of the City of New Albany's Historic Preservation Ordinance sets forth the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application procedure. In general, a COA must be issued prior to the start of any demolition, new construction, exterior alterations or moving of buildings within a designated historic district. Routine maintenance and interior work does not need a COA. If you have any questions as to whether the work you are planning requires a COA, please consult the chart included with these design guidelines or contact the City's Plan Department.

If your project does require a Certificate of Appropriateness, an application form can be obtained in the City Offices on the third floor of the City-County Building, 311 Hauss Square. The application must be filled out in its entirety and returned, along with a small processing fee, to the city's Plan Department. Supporting materials that further explain the proposed work should also be supplied with the application.

For new construction, these supporting materials should include:

- ◆ *a site plan showing existing and proposed structures;*
- ◆ *photographs showing a view of the street and adjacent buildings;*
- ◆ *elevations of the proposed new building;*
- ◆ *and any additional supporting documentation that may assist the Commission in its decision-making.*

New construction projects are also subject to a pre-application review process – the applicant should plan to meet with the commission and staff for a non-binding discussion of the project prior to submitting a COA application.

For the rehabilitation of an existing building, supporting materials should include:

- ◆ *photographs showing existing conditions;*
- ◆ *descriptions or samples of materials to be used;*
- ◆ *for a substantial rehabilitation, site plans and floor plans;*
- ◆ *and any additional supporting documentation that may assist the Commission in its decision-making.*

When the application is determined by the staff to be complete, it will be placed on the agenda for the Commission's review. Regular Commission meetings are held once a month, and an application must be received at least two weeks prior to a meeting in order to be on the agenda for that meeting.

Commission members will receive copies of all applications and supporting materials in advance of the meeting, and are encouraged to visit the properties where work is planned. Members always try to visit at reasonable times and will be happy to talk with you during the visit.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend the Commission meeting at which their COA application will be reviewed, or to have a knowledgeable representative present. At the meeting, the Commission staff will present the project, outlining the work that is proposed and the staff's analysis of how that work fits within the design guidelines. After the Commission members ask questions of the staff, the applicant has the opportunity to speak to the Commission and answer any questions. Members of the public who may be present at the meeting will also be given the opportunity to comment upon the application.

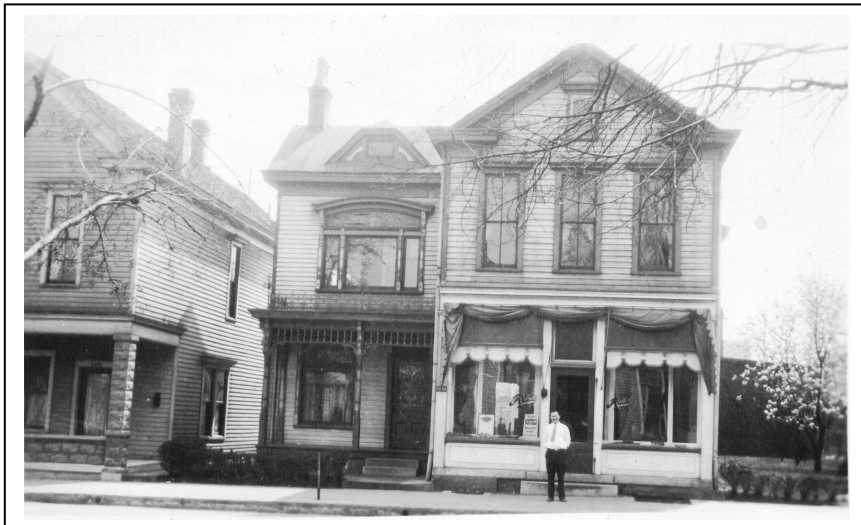
After all comments have been heard, a motion may be made to approve or deny the application, or approve it with conditions. A simple majority of the Commission must vote in favor of a motion in order for it to be

carried. Decisions may be appealed to the Floyd County Circuit Court or the Floyd County Superior Court.

## **Before You Begin Your Project**

As you plan your project, consider the effect that it will have on your historic building and its surroundings. Below are a few things that you and your designer or contractor should consider early in the planning process.

- ☞ When historic materials are removed, they are gone forever. Can the work be designed and built in a way to minimize such removal?
- ☞ Interior projects such as plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems often have an impact on the exterior of a structure. Can the work be designed and built in a way to minimize the exterior effects?
- ☞ The Preservation Commission does not regulate interior changes; however, interior features can contribute significantly to the historic character of a building. If an interior project is planned, can the work be done in a way to avoid creating an 'historic shell' where the interior loses its integrity? Can the removal of historic fabric be minimized?



*Ritter's Bakery (1218 East Oak Street), c.1930*

- ☞ Adaptive reuse projects, such as converting a former manufacturing facility to residences, bring special challenges. Can the work be done so as to minimize the destruction of valuable historic features? Will new construction, if necessary, combine skilled new design and craftsmanship with old, thereby enhancing both?
- ☞ In energy efficiency projects, it is important to note that the majority of heat loss occurs through infiltration, not through transpiration through side walls. Are all windows, doors and other openings properly caulked, weatherstripped and tight? Are vapor barriers properly installed in attics or ceilings? Are storm windows a better and more cost-effective alternative than new insulated glass units?
- ☞ Some building sites are better than others. Is your site contributing to deterioration of your historic building by channeling water toward a foundation, retaining wall, or other important feature?
- ☞ The cumulative effect of multiple projects can sometimes add up to the loss of historic character. What effect will all the projects you are planning have on your historic property?

- ☞ Poor maintenance practices can have a devastating effect on the value of an historic resource. Is your building being properly and routinely maintained?